ance, nothing unusual seemed to be around, and we turned to head back to camp for the last time, only to be drawn to strange calls that were not immediately recognisable. As the team continued down, I glimpsed a group of four birds apparently responsible for the calls fly to new perches and, observing the chestnut wash on the chest of one individual, I hastily beckoned the others back. We watched the weavers in awe for 3-5 minutes and the whole chaotic business - fumbling with the scope, laughter and excitement - was caught on tape together with the weavers' twittering! It was a wonderful culmination to our survey and Stuart's[10] earlier prediction that the Tanzania Mountain Weaver might occur at Mt Nilo was finally proven.

Several birds, including such rarities as Swynnerton's Forest Robin *Swynnertonia swynnertoni*, East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi* and the Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae*, have recently been added to the East Usambara list[12] making the forests one of the highest conservation priorities in Africa. This is probably a testament to the value of exploring the many patches beyond Amani where many more sites await even the most basic of surveys. The Tanzania Mountain Weaver is probably an easily overlooked species and may occur not only in more sites in the East Usambaras, but also other little-explored 'Eastern Arc' mountains. With the development of the Important Bird Areas programme in Tanzania, such surveys should illuminate further details on many of Africa's elusive and rare birds.

This study was sponsored by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the UK Partner of BirdLife. Many thanks to Dr Neil Burgess and to Neil and Liz Baker for their support. Mr MIL Katigula kindly provided permission to visit the Usambaras.

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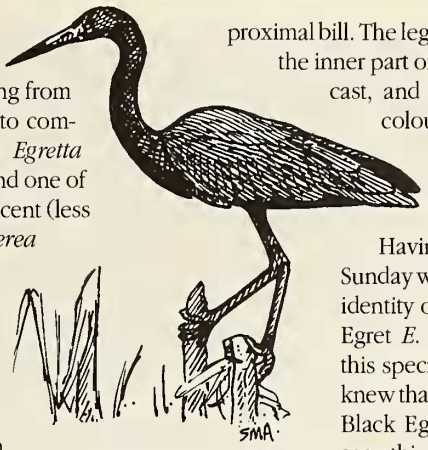
Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* in South Africa

Richard K. Brooke[a] & David T. Parkin[b]

During April 1992, DTP was a visiting lecturer at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute for African Ornithology where RKB is librarian. On the weekend of 10-12 April, we spent a couple of days birdwatching northwards from Cape Town up the west coast of Cape Province. On Saturday 11 April, we decided to spend a couple of hours watching the waders on the shore adjacent to the road bridge at Velddrif. Within a couple of minutes of arriving, DTP noticed a grey egret that appeared different from the other birds that were present. He drew RKB's attention to it, who also recognised it as a species unfamiliar to him. We watched the bird for about 30

minutes during which time it did rather little. We got excellent views in a variety of light conditions ranging from good to very good, and were able to compare it directly with Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* which were also present, and one of which was occasionally closely adjacent (less than five metres). Grey *Ardea cinerea* and Purple *A. purpurea* Herons were also in the immediate vicinity for comparison.



Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*
By Mark Andrews

The grey egret's behaviour was clearly different from all of these species. It spent long periods of time peering at the ground about 0.5 m in front of its toes. It would occasionally take a food item after one of these watches. It moved only occasionally, and then just a few metres, before resuming its wait-and-see hunting style. For much of the first period that we watched it, only the body was visible as the bird stood adjacent to a small creek, and we were unable to get clear views of its legs and feet. After about 20 minutes it flew across the flats to a position beside the water's edge, and we could see it more clearly. We watched it at distances of about 300 m through a 20x wide angle Kowa telescope. In addition, DTP used Zeiss Dialyt 10x40 binoculars and RKB used 9x30 Nikons. The light was excellent, being alternately thin overcast, and bright sunlight. We left the bird where we found it at approximately 14.00h.

The following description is based on notes that were made at the time .

In size, it was very close to Little Egret, although it appeared more bulky which gave it a compact, rather than elongate appearance. The legs were similar in length to Little Egret, but the bill was slightly shorter (seen alongside) and quite clearly deeper, especially at the base. It appeared thick and pointed, almost wedge-shaped, rather than spear-like as in the Little Egret. There were a few elongate feathers on the back which did not reach the tail, but could be seen when ruffled by the wind. There were no obvious plumes from the head or neck.

The plumage was generally grey. The body was pretty uniformly slate-coloured, and it was slightly paler on the head and neck. There was no white on the neck, throat or underparts, nor was the plumage relieved by any warmth. The wings were slightly darker than the breast and belly, but not dramatically so. The distal third of the bill was blackish, the inner two-thirds were pale grey, giving a marked contrast that was the most conspicuous feature of the bird. The bare skin between bill and eye was the same colour as the proximal bill. The legs and feet were darker grey than the inner part of the bill with a distinct greenish cast, and they did not differ in relative colouration. In dull light they appeared somewhat similar to the inner bill, but were strikingly different in good light.

Having no field guide in the car, the Sunday was spent in long debate over the identity of the bird. DTP suggested Slaty Egret *E. vinaceigula* but RKB had seen this species both alive and as skins, and knew that it was not. In turn, he suggested Black Egret *E. ardesiaca,* but DTP had seen this in The Gambia and was equally certain that it was not this either. Rather unsatisfactorily, we concluded that it might be a dark form of Western Reef Heron *E. gularis,* a form that neither of us had seen! Monday 13 April saw us in the Percy FitzPatrick Institute library at 07.00hr. working systematically through the heron literature. On the basis of the anatomical, plumage and behavioural characteristics that we had recorded, we concluded that this bird was a Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* in its second winter. The combination of size, bill structure, uniform grey plumage, and the distinctive leg and bill colouration was conclusive.

A piebald egret had been seen several times prior to our visit but had remained unrecognised[1]. Presumably, this was the same individual in its juvenile plumage. The bird was subsequently seen by many other observers. According to Philip Hockey, it spent much of its time searching the creeks and salt pans for frogs and fish. It did not forage in association with any other species, but roosted with Grey Herons, Long-tailed (Reed) Cormorants *Phalacrocorax africanus,* African Darters *Anhinga melanogaster,* and waterfowl. It was still present on 29 October 1994.

The record was accepted by the Southern African Rarities Committee as the first for South Africa. The only previous record for the Old World is a bird that had been ringed as a nestling in New Jersey in late June 1964, and was recovered in the Azores on 28 November of the same year[2].

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